

Impacts of Fishing on the Spread of Earthworms

Earthworm species that are popular as bait for fishing are more often found near boat launches and are rare at other locations. Dumping bait by fishermen seems to be another way that earthworms are being transported to the northern forests. Surveys of fishermen using earthworm bait in Alberta tell us that 51% dump their bait after they are done fishing on either the shore or in the lake.

The earthworms most commonly used as bait are the larger mineral soil-dwelling and deep-burrowing earthworms. These two types of earthworms tend to have larger effects when they invade, often resulting in the complete devouring of the leaf litter layer.



Nightcrawler earthworms are an example of deep-burrowing worms. They are used for bait because of their large size. Once fishermen are done with them they typically dump them, thus introducing worms to areas where no worms would normally be seen.

Image from:
<http://www.wholesalefishingworms.com/>

Unfortunately, we still don't know much about earthworm distributions in Alberta, making it difficult to know what their effects will be over time. However, the more information about worm distribution that's available the more effective scientists will be at predicting the future of Alberta's northern forests.

Reflections:

1. How is angling with worms as bait increasing the rate of their dispersal?

2. If earthworms are harmful to Alberta's forests, what other kinds of fishing bait could be used to reduce the harm?

Adapted From: Cameron, E., & Boyce, M. (2013) Don't dump your worms! Earthworms are trashing our forests. *Alberta Outdoorsmen*, Volume 15 (2), 16-18.

Last Updated: October 22, 2014